D O M B İ L İ

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“One of the purest, most joyful games of our childhood was "Laughplay." When five or six mischievous kids would get together, we'd take turns imitating laughter. After a few similes, we'd lose control, catching the contagious laughing bug, and we'd burst out laughing until tears welled up in our eyes and we collapsed on the ground, practically dying of laughter. So much so that it was inevitable that someone watching us from afar would wonder, and perhaps even openly envy, "What are they laughing at?"

“**We couldn't have predicted the direction our old friend's nostalgic speech would take. However, we knew that, having known him well, it was only natural for him to move from seemingly irrelevant topics to meaningful commentary. This man had a profound meaning for life, and this greatness was evident in every aspect of his life.**

“We laughed just for the sake of laughing. Our laughter was a self-serving behavior. Laughplay wasn't just a game; it was undoubtedly the sweetest reflection of childhood's boundless freedom and friendship. Then... we grew up, and frankly, like so many things, we forgot how to laugh. Today, we can now offer philosophical answers to the question, "What were we laughing at?"

He took a short breath. He recited these lines from a famous poet:

“There would be evenings deep like a memory of the past,
Like a mirage in a world of dreams.”

A faint smile appeared on his face, probably influenced by nostalgia. He continued his reminiscences.

“Much later, the most colorful character in our adult group of friends was undoubtedly "Dombili." Although he severed his friendship with the person outside our small group who, by using the epithet with the intention of insulting himself, emphasized the word's derogatory potential, the word remained

used for a while in a mocking and derogatory sense for him due to his plump, or rather "amorphous" appearance. The word, which carries both cuteness and potential for exclusion, was generally a description of physique, but was not considered acceptable in our language. In other words, it was not just a body description; it was also an example of how society intertwines cuteness with mockery, and it became the perfect dress for our friend.

“I'm sure his wider circle of friends envied us the weekend getaways we'd take in his car, which would liven up our monotonous lives. As we strolled through the crowded streets of the big city, with its many shops, as if we were ignorant, he'd always take us by the arm and lead us into a ready-made clothing store to pick out a suit for himself.

“His physique defied all industry standards. His body was designed to say "No!" to the art of tailoring. And naturally, no matter how hard the shop assistant tried, no garment could ever truly "chemically match" our friend's body; every garment tried on paid homage to his shapelessness.

“On the last try, he appeased the attendant. "No body here is adequately prepared for my anatomical complexities. This jacket isn't tight on me. It's too tight for my philosophy of life. It screams 'don't take up too much space'!"

“Our amorphous friend was a perfect example of the northern human type. It's said that the rugged terrain and harsh natural conditions have made the locals stubborn, resilient, and hardworking. These people are sincere and genuine, expressing their thoughts openly. They are also quick to anger and calm, with intense emotions. They are warm-hearted and hospitable. They are generally known for their cheerful, humorous, and friendly nature, which is one way they cope with challenges. I think our friendship was more influenced by his driving us around in his car than by his cheerful, humorous, and friendly nature.

Even though we didn't notice the subtlety, we were finding clues about where to laugh from the curls of our humorous friend's lips, whose knowledge and talent we trusted.

“I can say he was generous. Although he bought small gifts for everyone in the group without discrimination, I don't recall any of us returning them. Unlike other northern friends I knew, his primary personality trait was a childlike sense of humor. His comedic performances were crude and primitive, lacking the intellectual refinement of his ancestors and reminiscent of cavemen. He was seen to have an imitation of the style of a stage actor who was very popular with the public at the time.

“This artist's field was absurdist comedy, a genre unsophisticated and based on simple, primitive reactions. This section of our cinematic history hadn't yet been fully recognized. His protagonist's extreme and irrational reactions to his environment, social norms, and everyday events aimed to elicit laughter through sheer absurdity. And it was clearly in keeping with the spirit of the times.

“This enterprising artist's formal theater training demonstrates that "vulgar" humor was a conscious choice. His protagonist wasn't simply an incidental character; he was the arrival of a voice ignored by society. His humor resonated as the "provincial scream." He melted together the anger, crudeness, and sincerity that people suppressed and ignored in their subconscious. He overturned the codes of drawing-room comedy, which usually relied on urban, measured, and intellectual wit, with a character who was crude yet honest, blunt yet genuine. Against the sterile structure of this comedy, a figure was created that appealed more directly to the public's laughter reflex. This hero was both criticized and embraced—because he embodied society's contradictions. He was the role model for "Dombili."

Our old friend's speech, as we had expected, took on a broader perspective. It had begun with the past and was clearly destined to delve into philosophy. We now knew this from experience.

“When we examine the ancient ruins that extend from the depths of history to the present day in our fertile lands, we confront an awe-inspiring truth. The existence of theaters in at least 150 of the 200 recorded ancient cities is a hallmark of a

civilization where art penetrated the very heart of life and nourished the soul. This is not just an architectural datum, but a sign of a world in which art embraces human existence to a greater extent.

“Here, comedy takes its origins from the bawdy melodies and narratives that echoed during the exuberant moments of banquets, or the sharp jokes directed at individuals and established stereotypes. Dionysian festivals, in particular, were times of unleashed enthusiasm and wine. People would pour into the streets, clad in outlandish costumes, and, as if following the "pied piper of the village of Hamelin," they would dance wildly, captivated by the enchanting sound of flutes and singing obscene folk songs. This mocking mob would not hesitate to taunt and satirize the city's notables along the way.

“Even though these vivid scenes that played out in our minds transported us to other worlds, these worlds were unfamiliar, and for some reason, we could be said to have felt the pressure of a repulsive attitude stemming from our upbringing. But I could see that the friend whose humor we trusted was listening to the old man with innocent attention.

“The flourishing of comedy was directly intertwined with the social and political atmosphere of Athens; it was a seamless reflection of Athenian democracy. The comedian had the freedom to relentlessly ridicule everyone and everything. Anything he believed deserved satire—the ruling class, the failings of the era's education, the established mores of the people, and the state's political stance—became the target of his sharp pen.

“Among these writers, Aristophanes was a conservative voice, firmly committed to tradition and resistant to all innovation. He disapproved of any change in literature and art. This attitude was also felt towards the Sophists, the groundbreaking thinkers of the period, and, naturally, Socrates. For in Aristophanes' eyes, these thinkers were dangerous revolutionaries who shattered traditions and disregarded deeply rooted customs. Indeed, one of his works targeted Socrates himself and his understanding of education.

“The play's ending was devastating, as Socrates cited comedy as one of the key factors leading to his arrest and death sentence. Plato's experience of his teacher Socrates being denigrated through satire, and how this contributed to his death, was one of the most significant personal experiences that reinforced his "skeptical and strict" view of comedy. The fact that Socrates, striving to attain philosophy and true knowledge, fell victim to crude public entertainment reinforced Plato's idea that in his ideal state, "art and poets, including comedians, should be controlled or comedy should be banned." Unlike Plato, Aristotle viewed art and comedy not as a moral threat, but as a reflection of human nature and an educational tool. Comedy is a valuable artistic expression that allows people to see their flaws in a harmless way and thus understand themselves and their society.

“Ironically, in Athens, rather than restricting this freedom, the state even allocated funds for the staging of these plays. While comedy structurally shares some elements of tragedy, over time it evolved into a distinct and powerful branch of drama.

Two thousand years later, this is a practice still employed by rulers today to ensure the public has time for entertainment. Interesting, indeed!

“Socrates's conviction cast a profound shadow over the "law and justice system" in Athens, considered the "cradle of democracy," and this continues to be debated even today. However, Athens' bitter defeat in the Peloponnesian War and the ensuing economic collapse changed everything during that period, when democracy was temporarily shaken. Personal and political satire had virtually disappeared from comedic works. The subject of mockery shifted from a specific figure to general situations and social themes. The mirror of art, under the influence of social trauma, became a more distant and universal reflection.

“In summary, philosophical and social transformations such as the weakening of Athens' city-state identity, the destruction of the Peloponnesian Wars, and the individualism of the Hellenistic period that began with the conquests of

Alexander the Great were the most effective and lasting change factors that shifted the course of comedy from politics to the individual's private life such as family, love, and marriage.

If we'd been told we were going to see the history of serious laughter, we probably would have laughed. Moreover, our small group was following the lesson intently, as if they were about to be tested.

“In Rome, comedy was also highly popular and remained important, but unlike in Ancient Greece, it largely lost its former importance as a philosophical/political tool for debating ideas, engaging in political satire, and directly shaping society. It became an art form focused on entertainment and individualistic themes.

“Amid the roar of war and the migration of tribes, the curtain fell forever on Rome's great theaters. Those majestic stages no longer hosted cheerful comedy or noble tragedy; they were silenced. The places where laughter once echoed became either tombs of stone or, in the bitter irony of destruction, quarries that provided the building blocks of the new order.

“During the Dark Ages, the great political and literary theatre of ancient Greece and Rome virtually disappeared from the stage. But acting, spectacle, and dramatic expression quietly continued in the form of itinerant entertainments and religious rites.

“What was the situation in the East, with the rigidity of Caste and the Culture of Honour in India and Japan? . . . In a hierarchical structure considered unchangeable and divinely derived, rigidity is often a great obstacle to open criticism, especially when directed against the upper castes by the lower castes.”

“However, history and geography have shown that the existence and form of humor do not disappear within conservative or rigid social structures; they merely transform and adapt. Humor is a powerful tool that can serve any ideology, conservative or liberal, or be used to defend values. Even when social structures like the Culture of Honor operate as censors, where direct criticism and ridicule are avoided because they disrupt caste and social harmony, which are

considered immutable and divinely derived, humor continues to serve as a release of tension through indirect means, such as rituals or self-deprecation. This clearly demonstrates that humor is a universal human behavior, but that culture and ideology shape it.

"I never thought of that," said the humorous friend next to me, who had been caught up in the flow of the conversation with naive attention. "I thought conservatism was rigid and never allowed for humor."

“Yet, theater, whose primary function was to provide the audience with aesthetic pleasure and a pleasant pastime, was a vibrant platform for observation, feeling, and reflection. Of course, in addition to providing these, it also had an educational and developmental function.

“Let's face it, if tragedy is the weight of life that weighs down on us like an inevitable fate, then comedy is the sole defense mechanism that lightens the burden of that fate and protects our consciousness. This harmony, which makes life bearable, whispers of the soul's resilience. While the cruel and inevitable face of fate manifests itself through tragedy, the human soul seeks refuge in the face of this crushing weight behind the curtain of comedy.

“While Shakespeare's works resemble a rainbow, moving from tragedy to historical drama, from romantic comedy to problem comedy, Molière's works are largely concentrated in a single field. Yet, he excels in it. What makes Shakespeare so diverse is his masterful handling of nearly every dramatic genre, with his historical plays, great tragedies, and late romantic plays. Molière, on the other hand, viewed comedy as a surgical tool and dedicated his genius to deepening his knowledge in this field. Elizabethan theater was less prescriptive and more dynamic. Shakespeare could move freely between genres, adhering to no strict rules. In an era when genres were expected to be strictly defined, Molière chose to reach the highest level of the genre by remaining within the boundaries of comedy.

What was all this detail? . . . It was as if he considered all these lecture notes, which sometimes seemed

unnecessary and prone to stretching, necessary as a foundation for the clarity of his thesis. Moreover, amidst so many layers, it wasn't even clear what his thesis was.

“In Kant's approach to religion, his defense of reason's autonomy in the face of the church's claim to absolute truths creates a distinct "dissonance." However, his dissonance with the church possesses not only philosophical but also humorous potential. This potential manifests itself not through direct humor, but through exposing the structural absurdities of dogmas. He places church dogmas on the scales of reason and often refutes them. Kant's laughter arises from his recognition of the church's abandonment of morality and its immersion in ritual—the sudden and strange incompatibility of a concrete object like the historical church with a universal concept like the religion of reason. His humor, especially in his approach to religion and church institutions, reveals signs of a critical harshness and sarcasm that could be called "black humor." This is evident in his radical critiques of religious philosophy, which at times take the form of harsh satire or sarcasm. In his work, he strongly criticizes priests, theologians, and congregationalists for embracing a religion based on miracles, superstitions, and the supernatural, rather than focusing on the moral law. His targeting of those who mistake the trivialization of moral action for "piety" approaches the "irony of black humor" with his theme of the substitution of absurd and empty acts for the lofty aims of religion. He argues that Christianity should be understood as a "natural religion focused on morality" rather than a dogmatic belief system based on miracles. Some see Kant's interpretation of Christianity in this way as a "Trojan horse" that exploits religious concepts for its own purposes. This metaphor alone demonstrates how critical, even destructive, Kant's ideas were perceived.

He didn't hesitate to summarize the topic. However, I must admit that the intertwining of religion, philosophy, and art has created an insoluble confusion in our minds. What was he trying to achieve with all this?

“Kant's radical, morally based critique of religious philosophy, while targeting the empty and absurd practices of

traditional religious and ecclesiastical institutions, possesses a harsh satire or sarcasm that reflects the disillusionment, pain, and absurdity of seriousness underlying modern "black humor." This critique was perceived as hostile and destructive by the authorities and religious circles of the time.

“The existence and form of humor never disappears in conservative or rigid social structures; it simply transforms and adapts.

“Humor is a powerful tool that can serve any ideology, conservative or liberal. As seen in Aristophanes, it can even be used to defend conservative values.

“Even when social structures like caste and a culture of honor censor direct criticism, humor continues to function as a release of tension, whether indirectly, through rituals or self-deprecation. How "harsh" or "direct" humor is depends on a society's norms about what constitutes 'laughing.' These examples clearly demonstrate that humor is a universal human behavior, but that culture and ideology shape it.

I confess, we were completely lost. We were facing a modern version of Rumi's "hopping from branch to branch" style, and I don't think anyone remembered where we started. As if reading my mind, the witty, intelligent friend next to me couldn't help but shout, "Dombili!" But it seemed there was still time to talk about Dombili.

“As you know, the reaction of an imam who became angry at the congregation for not listening to the sermon and instead focusing on their phones in a mosque recently went viral on social media. In the video, the imam said, "I'm not leading prayers. Leave the mosque and go! Am I going to mess with you? Everyone has their phones in their hands. I'll broadcast live, so you can pray your Friday prayers at home." The cleric's refusal to lead his congregation was said to be an act of abandoning authority and position for the sake of personal ethics and conscience.

Another viral video on social media involved a traffic police officer issuing a ticket. The officer had become a phenomenon by explaining traffic rules and penalties in humorous videos. Following complaints about these posts, the

General Directorate of Security (EGM) launched a disciplinary investigation. The investigation resulted in a salary reduction and a short-term suspension for "providing public information without authorization," and a warning for "engaging in prohibited behavior while on duty." The incident resulted in the traffic police officer's short-term suspension, but he remained active on social media.

“Both examples demonstrate that individuals, within their own small spheres, are searching for answers to the question, "What does authority mean and how is it exercised?" Authoritarian governments demand that rule enforcement be conducted in authoritarian language. Police, on the other hand, replace this official language with the humorous, humane language of social media. This softens the state's rigid facade, but also allows individuals to accept the rule with less backlash and more internalization. By sharing authority with the public, the rule enforcer enhances their legitimacy.

“The sudden appearance of a Pikachu character in a formal, strict police chase instantly nullifies the seriousness of the situation. Regardless of the legal outcome, what remains in the public memory is Pikachu's sympathetic escape. This demonstrates how the power of legal authority can weaken in the face of the public's power to laugh and share.

Everyone saw that scene on television. A smile appeared on all of our faces again.

“But when we combine the Pikachu incident with the cleric and the wisecracking policeman, the relationship between the fragility of authority and unexpected human moments becomes clearer. These examples demonstrate that even in the face of the highest levels of authoritarianism, individuals and events continually find new ways to overcome the barrier of seriousness and fear.

From that moment on, our old friend re-entered the field of humor in our country.

“Humor, with its deep-rooted accumulation extending from the erudite witticisms of Nasreddin Hodja to the confrontational wit of Karagöz and Hacivat, aims to provoke laughter while actually filtering social and individual flaws and

injustices through a finely tuned critique. While the sole possessor of a fiery style that ignites the heavens with the fire of his eulogies, hits the bull's-eye with his satirical arrows, and both praises and denounces with his words, he is a formidable poet who ultimately falls victim to his sharp tongue and loses his life as punishment for his words. He is a "District Governor of Satire" who wages war against those who corrupt the system from within. And a dervish, a demoniac, who spits in the face of the world and hypocrisy with every "Nothing" sound emanating from his flute, who becomes a devout man with his saz, a heretic with his words, who pierces the conscience of the age with his satires. These are just a few of our country's talents that cannot be included in the international rankings of humor...

Then, as if giving a test, he asked, “When ending a story, would you choose a conclusion that transitions from absurdist comedy to dark humor, or a finale that transitions from dark humor to absurdist comedy?” We exchanged glances. It was like the questions he’d been asking his students for years, to check for understanding.

“A traditional protest requires serious faces, clear slogans, and defiant stances. However, the contrast between the inflatable Pikachu costume and the Riot Police automatically renders the situation absurd. This absurd comparison ridicules the state's seriousness and repression. Instead of quelling a riot, the police appear to be chasing a giant cartoon character. This situation undermines the fundamental seriousness and legitimacy of the authority's actions. Pikachu's presence instantly relegates all political messages and slogans to the background. The event quickly transforms from a serious political action into a superficial yet emotionally powerful image. This connects to today's critique of the society of the spectacle. Even serious political action only gains global attention when it takes on an absurd and attention-grabbing form. By capturing attention through the absurd, the Pikachu demonstrates that traditional political discourse no longer works and that meaning has been "hijacked" by popular culture. The costume conceals the protester's identity, granting them a kind of anonymous heroic power and reducing the risk of oppression

for the individual. The impact of an anonymous Pikachu is more universal than that of a single individual. Using a frivolous figure in a serious context conveys the message that seriousness itself is not the only thing to be taken seriously. The absurd satirizes the status quo by demonstrating the fragility of rigid social and political rules.

The one next to me couldn't help but say, "This isn't a victory. Not at all. I would have preferred the democratic struggle to win, instead of Pikachu's absurd comedy and the reign of meaninglessness." Our old friend, however, seemed withdrawn into his own world. He launched into a fragmented, disorganized, and seemingly incomplete speech.

“While working in conservative areas of the country, I observed the differences in the local people's sense of humor. I would burst out laughing at a joke, only to be met with a silence that made me feel out of place. I would sense the uncertainty in the response to subtle jokes, suggesting a powerful control mechanism had been established.

“It's hard to find words to describe the devastating psychology of someone who, after languishing in prison for a time based entirely on slander, sees that the nightmare doesn't end when they're released, only to be arrested again a short time later. It can only be explained with dark humor. The actions of the mindset that perpetrated this are not called "justice for justice's sake," but "injustice for politics."

“Enemy Criminal Law positions certain individuals as "enemies" rather than "citizens" and suspends legal protections for them. For individuals identified as enemies, principles of the rule of law, such as the presumption of innocence and the right to a fair trial, may be deemed invalid.

Then, just when we thought the topic had drifted away, he continued his speech without changing his tone. However, none of us realized he had moved on to the finale.

“He was at the nursing home located in the district that hosts the country’s most prestigious—indeed, most reputable—prison, proudly celebrated by the Justice bureaucracy as it heralds the opening of new and modern penitentiaries like glad tidings. When we visited him, he didn't recognize us. He was in

the final stages of the illness, which had caused significant impairments in his cognitive and functional abilities. His ability to recall past events had almost completely vanished. He couldn't even remember close family members. He struggled to find words and couldn't form sentences. He had a complete loss of sense of time, place, and person, and he couldn't recognize where he was, what year he was in, or the people around him.

“His speech had largely disappeared. His mental faculties were severely impaired, requiring complete dependence for daily life. The memory was a memory that had been destroyed and had completely lost its past through mental collapse.

“This memory had receded from him like a sea receding from the shore, leaving only an indefinable silence and the shadows of unfamiliar faces. Time no longer flowed for him; yesterday, today, and tomorrow seemed to melt into the same mist, while his past seemed to have fallen into a dark well. His mind, once filled with memories, was now an empty house—its doors open, its rooms deserted, its walls echoless. He could no longer even recall his own name; his life had disintegrated like the pages of a notebook that had slipped from his hand. His mind had succumbed to the dense darkness of forgetfulness; he looked at faces but could not recognize them, heard words but could not understand them.

"Now his past was like a torn-out tree—rootless, directionless, memoryless. His mind was like a ransacked city—his memories pillaged, his memory set ablaze. When he looked into the faces of his children, he saw strangers, not people he loved. He was so lost that he didn't even realize he was lost. His existence had become a shadow, his soul like the flickering light of a lamp slowly dying.

“Where he had once been proud of his family name, he had become a forgotten object. To understand someone's absence, one must first know their existence. His children had said, "We can't take care of him." It seemed that giving up on one's father was as short, as easy as that sentence.

Our old friend finally fell silent. We waited in tense anticipation. In a low voice, almost a whisper, he simply said, "Dombili."

Suluova
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